

BEECHER HALL  
JACKSONVILLE ILL

Morgan Co

Illinois College

HABS NO. 25-11

HABS

ILL.

69-JAGVI,

2A.

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

CENTRAL ILLINOIS DISTRICT NO. 25

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
EDGAR E. LUNDEEN DISTRICT OFFICER  
BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS

## 1. Name of Owner and Occupant:

Illinois College.

## 2. Date of present Ownership and Occupancy:

1829 --- 105 years.

## 3. Names of previous Owners and Occupants with Dates:

None.

## 4. Alterations during present Ownership and Occupancy and Names of Architects, Builders, with Dates:

From 1856 until the last few years class room partitions have been removed, various and sundry alterations made in partitions, doors, fireplaces, etc. in general by job work. Present Portico built in 1928, Dennison B. Hull, Chicago, Architect, Frank Irving, Jacksonville, Illinois, Builder.

## 5. Earlier allocations, with Dates, and Names of Builders and Architects:

Original stairs removed and present cylinder stairs built in their place later than 1866, being of late Victorian style, Architect and Builder unknown. No Portico mentioned as having been built when the building was erected in 1829-30. Photographs extant show that a Portico was built in position of the present one, design indicating it as having been built before 1845.

## 6. Date of original construction, with Names of Builder and Architect:

1829-30 --- James Kerr of Jacksonville, Illinois, a carpenter and joiner, drew the plans and built the building. Ruberts and Berry of Jacksonville, Illinois, located the brick pit and were the brick-makers and brick-masons.

## 7. Personages and Events associated with:

## a. during present Occupancy

Rev. John M. Ellis, a founder, Edward Beecher, first President of the College, A. Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, Henry Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain. Founding of first College in Illinois. Founding of first Medical School in Illinois.

## b. during previous Occupancy

Same. See History of Beecher Hall, written for this Survey by Carl E. Black, A.M. M.D., Trustee-Secretary of Illinois College and President of Morgan County Historical Society.

## 8. Additional Comment:

One of the most historical buildings in Illinois.  
Charming example of the old New England type of architecture.

(Approved)

Logan E. Lundeen

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

Beecher Hall -- One of the most Historic Buildings in Illinois. Housed the First College and the First Medical School in Illinois.

JACKSONVILLE, MORGAN CO.

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By Carl E. Black, A.M., M.D.

March 1934

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At the request of Mr. Clarence Buckingham, an Architect, representing this territory for the Historic American Buildings Survey by the United States Department of the Interior of which Mr. Edgar E. Lundeen is the District Officer under the Federal Project of the Civil Works Administration, I have prepared the following historic facts regarding the erection of Beecher Hall, which was the first College Building to be opened in the State of Illinois.

The other early Colleges in Illinois began as Seminaries and those which prospered later became Colleges, but Illinois College, or the "Prairie College" as it was sometimes called by the pioneers, opened its doors as a college in 1829 (minutes of Board of Trustees Dec. 18, 1829) and has continued as such ever since. Today (March 1934) it is more prosperous and efficient than at any time in its history.

As early as 1827 there was a wide spread determination among the settlers of the Illinois prairies to secure for their children the advantages of higher education. A belief in the value of education was strong in the pioneer. This may seem a contradictory sentiment when one considers the rough exterior

of the early settler in the midst of his primitive surroundings, but life was full of contradictions. It was also saturated with aspirations for the future and education was one of those aspirations.

The early settlements of Central Illinois contained a surprising number of well educated people, and naturally these became leaders in seeking the establishment of educational institutions.

The idea of a seminary or college in this region originated locally, not in Jacksonville but in a movement among the leaders of Morgan, Sangamon, Montgomery, Bond, Madison and other neighboring counties. The original Board of Trustees was a board of laymen and was composed of Doctors, Lawyers, Merchants and Farmers from the communities of all of these counties.

A quarter of a century later Dr. J.M. Sturtevant, then President of the College, wrote that Jacksonville "was at the time (1829) little better than a group of log cabins. The prairie was in the sombre brown of autumn, with scarce a tree or shrub to relieve the monotony. To the west, however, the view was shut in by an elevation, which a New Englander might, almost, recognize as a hill. It was crowned by a natural grove. Against the front of the grove was already projected an edifice of brick which at that distance, and on such an occasion, made an appearance of considerable dignity and magnificence. The site on which it stood charmed every beholder. It was the south half of what is now our college building, then

in process of erection."

The fact that the Board which originated the project did not carry it through was not due to any change in local sentiment. When a group of theological students at Yale College were inspired to bind themselves together for establishing a Missionary Educational Enterprise in the west it was only natural that those two groups should meet and join forces.

This is exactly what happened. After a free and frank discussion, the local Board turned over to the "Yale Band" all their assets, subscriptions and plans on condition that Eastern friends would contribute \$10,000.00 of Eastern money to the project. This money in addition to the pledges of cash, building materials, labor, furnishings etc. in the hands of the old board gave the enterprise an auspicious beginning.

In all the previous soliciting and negotiating one man stands out above all others - namely the Home Missionary, Rev. John M. Ellis. While Rev. Ellis was a Congregationalist, under the "plan of union" he became pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville (Ill). Throughout he was the power which stimulated and led the movement. He had the confidence of interested friends in the East and represented both groups in the West. He brought the two parties together and consummated their union. This gave the College a most fortunate start because Ellis saw to it that the whole thing was brought about with the utmost harmony, and the influential value of all the parties was preserved.

There seems to have been no serious disagreement as to the location. The site at Jacksonville seemed to appeal to all.

The following is quoted from the minutes of the Board of Trustees, January 3d. 1829:

"The size of the building to be 33 by 36 feet wide, two stories high, the first story 12 feet, and the second story 10 feet high in the clear between joists, with two chimneys in each end. The foundation to be of stone, three feet high, two feet of which to be under ground and one foot above ground, to be laid in good lime mortar above ground, 18 inches thick; two butments to support the summers for the floor, two feet square, two feet under ground; cut stone for capping the gable ends and chimney tops, to be faced in a neat and workman like manner; the remainder of the building to be of well burned Bricks; the side walls to be 18 inches thick below joist, and one foot thick above the joist, no vicep below the lower windows; vicep-ed above; the gable ends to be one foot thick. The whole to be neatly pointed and pencilled."

"The first floor to be inclined of three sides, as is described on the plan of said building, to be supported with stout summers and sleepers; the floor to be of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch plank, skeleton framed, with shelf and book board. Front and opposite folding doors, to be of two inch plank, and as represented on the plan. Eight windows in the first story, of 32 lights each of 8 by 10 glass, and a circular window over the door:-- Eight windows in the second story, of 24 lights each, of the

same size glass, and one window over the front door of 24 lights, with side lights of six panes on each side, and circular top, to correspond with the door below; also, one circular window in the gable end; the window sash to be of two inch plank, <sup>double</sup> hung, primed and glazed, and two coats of white paint; the windows to have venetian blinds, primed, and two coats of green paint. The walls between the base and surbase to be plain ceiled. The stand to be panelled to the floor, and turned banister railing on the top."

"The second floor to be subdivided, by lath and plastered partitions, into six rooms; the doors to be of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch plank, panelled, with moulding, trimmed with a plain architrave; windows to have a panelled breast, and plain trim with architrave; mantle pieces neat and plain. Floor of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch plank, faced and worked on edge, and secret nailed, with neat base and surbase. A good and sufficient roof, supported by a stout frame from the joists of the garret floor, to be done with sheathing and covered with shingles 18 inches long, averaging four inches wide, of the best quality. The two eaves to have troughed cornish gutters, with tin leaders. The whole of the carpenters' work to be primed, and two coats of white paint. The walls and ceiling to be plain finished, with three coats of plastering." (The walls were not plastered until the final unit was built several months later).

Ordered, "that notice be given that proposals will be received for building said Seminary, until the 20th of March next!"



Ordered, "that H. G. Taylor be requested to solicit the aid of Messrs. Ruberts & Berry in selecting a suitable spot for making the brick for said Seminary, and that said Ruberts and Berry be paid for the time spent in rendering said service!" James Kerr, who made the plans was a carpenter and joiner and Ruberts and Berry were brick makers and brick-masons.

There is no mention in the records of the stairway to the second floor. The front door (east) entered a vestibule 9x13 feet. The following facts about the original stairway are given by Mr. W. D. Wood of Jacksonville, who was a student at the College while the original stairway was still in use. He says:- "The stairs were divided into three sections. The first went up to the west against the south wall to a landing about six feet high. The second went up against the west wall from the first landing to a second landing and the third went from this landing to the second floor. Another stairway went up to the west against the south wall, over the first section, to the attic floor." Sometime later than 1866 these stairs were taken out and a circular stair going up to the west against the north wall of the vestibule reached the second floor vestibule. This is the present stairway. The second floor was originally divided into six rooms and the first floor into three. The whole of the south half of the first floor was used as a chapel and assembly room. The east half of it had a sloping floor and the west half was level. It was entered from a door in the south-east corner of the vestibule.

There were two steps up to the sloping floor. The second story hall was the same size and shape as the vestibule below.

The new Board took over these plans just as made by Mr. James Kerr and the old board and carried them out. The result was Beecher Hall or at least the first half of it. The building committee appointed by the old board was continued and carried out the plans.

While the plans for the building were executed the new board promptly decided that the institution should be opened as a "College" instead of a "Seminary" as originally planned.

Almost before the first class entered the College the new Board of Trustees instructed the same building committee to "ascertain what additional buildings are necessary to be added to Illinois College." "They reported that an addition 32 ft. north and south and 36 ft. east and west, of brick, two stories high ought to be added to the present building and therefore (the Board) resolved that such an addition be erected and that Messrs. Baldwin and Sturtevant be a committee to contract for the erection of such a building, and that they also contract for lathing and plastering the present building" (minutes of the Board of Trustees, Feb. 20th, 1930)

Evidently the old board had only provided for enclosing the building and when first used it was still unfinished. In other words the whole of Beecher Hall was built in 1829 and 1830 just as to all external appearances it stands today, in a good state of preservation.

No doubt all the plans were made by James Kerr who also, superintended the construction. The brick were made on the grounds and the lumber was sawed from the neighboring grove. The doors and window sash may have been made by Kerr and his workmen.

There is a legend about the College that the window glass came from Germany. Most likely they were bought in St. Louis although they may have been sent out from the east down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, to Naples.

While the minutes of the Board of Trustees are silent on the question it would be natural that this work would be done during the spring and summer so that the completed building would be ready for September school. This is confirmed by an arrangement that Prof. J. M. Sturtevant be permitted to occupy a part of the building with his family while other buildings which had been projected were being completed.

Beecher Hall has a large attic or third story which was divided into two large rooms with several closets. It was originally lighted by dormer windows which have since been removed. There was a circular window in each end. This portion of the building was also lathed and plastered.

Beecher Hall is of the old New England architecture with quaint details and has a beautiful massive appearance. The exterior brick work is laid up Flemish bond with bonded header and stretcher courses breaking the bond of verticle courses. This gives a soft wall texture. The Palladian

(triple) windows in the ends of the building are fine and the semi-circular attic windows are unusual. The main windows have small panes of glass. Many of these panes of glass are the original glass. These windows give character to the building. The original doors are of fine design and have a quaint appearance. The interior window and door, wood finish of the first floor assembly room is Adam style and is particularly interesting. Beecher Hall presents a most pleasing and satisfying appearance and in its simplicity is a beautiful building.

The building was named for the first President, Dr. Edward Beecher, who was a brother of Henry Ward and Thomas I. Beecher, two noted preachers.

Through the years Beecher Hall has been variously occupied. The College Class Rooms were here for many years, some of them until the Jones building was completed in 1896 although after Sturtevant Hall was completed in 1856 most of the class rooms were provided for there. The chemical laboratory and the College Library remained in the north end of Beecher Hall until the completion of Jones Hall.

Two men's Literary Societies were organized, one, Sigma Pi in 1843 and the other, Phi Alpha, in 1845. After the class rooms were removed from the south half of Beecher Hall the rooms were given over to these societies, Phi Alpha on the ground floor and Sigma Pi on the second floor. For a number of years these two societies have occupied the whole building.

In the meantime other Literary Societies occupied the

north rooms of Beecher Hall until they were provided for in other quarters.

In 1841 the College organized a Medical Department and for its first three years it was housed in the attic rooms-- that is; the dissecting room and the anatomical department were given these rooms. Later the Medical Department occupied a new building of its own. It is appropriate that this--the first Medical School in Illinois should have had its beginning in Beecher Hall-- the first College Building in Illinois. On the outside wall just to the south of the main entrance is a bronze tablet erected during the Centennial celebration, which reads as follows:- "In this building Illinois College established the first Medical School in Illinois in 1841; opened to students November 1843; closed 1848."

As will be seen from the above, Beecher Hall has had a great variety of uses and continues to be one of the outstanding ornaments of the State of Illinois. Many important people have passed through its doors as students, teachers or visitors. Among the many a few might be named:-

Rev. John M. Ellis, participated in founding Illinois College and Wabash College;

Edward Beecher, first President;

Julian M. Sturtevant, long time President, educator and writer;

Theron Baldwin, participated in the founding of Monticello Seminary;

William Curtis, early President of Knox College;

Newton Bateman the first superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois, the First President of the Illinois State Board of Health and later President of Knox College;

Judge Samuel D. Lockwood the first chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois;

William Kirby, missionary pastor and founder of Congregational churches;

Stephen A. Douglas;

Gideon Blackburn, trustee of Illinois College and founder of Blackburn College;

Stephen Hempstead, second Governor of Iowa;

Honorable Richard Yates, United States Senator and War Governor of Illinois;

Honorable Joseph Duncan, the fifth Governor of Illinois;

William Jennings Bryan, member of Congress, several times a candidate for President of the United States and Secretary of State in the Wilson Cabinet;

Brigadier General Daniel Marshall Draper;

Hiram E. Jones, the noted Platonic Philosopher;

Honorable William M. Springer, member of Congress, chairman of its Ways and Means Committee and Chief Justice of Indian Territory;

Henry Ward Beecher, noted pulpit orator and brother of the President of the College;

Harriet Beecher Stowe, noted author (Uncle Tom's Cabin)

Reverend Asa Turner, founder of Congregationalism in Iowa, and participated in founding of Grinnell College;

William Berry, partner of Abraham Lincoln;

Truman H. Post, noted teacher and Devine;

Mark Twain;

Brigadier General John I. Binaker;

Honorable Thomas J. C. Flagg, Justice of the Supreme  
Court of Missouri;

Honorable Robert A. Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of  
Missouri;

Horace Greely;

E. W. Blatchford, Civic Leader and Manufacturer of Chicago

Brigadier General Leonard F. Ross;

Greene V. Black, Dentist, Physician, and often spoken of  
as the "Father of Modern Dentistry"

Colonel Edward Prince;

Dr. David Prince, noted Pioneer Surgeon and First Pro-  
fessor of Surgery in Illinois.

Brigadier General John Tillson, Jr.

Frederick Douglass;

Brigadier General Charles E. Lippincott;

Wendell Phillips, noted lecturer;

Dr. William Jayne, author, personal friend of Abraham  
Lincoln and first Governor of the Territory of Dakota;

Brigadier General Henry Yates;

Joseph N. Carter, Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois

Honorable Paul Selby, Editor and Founder of the Republican  
Party;

Abraham Lincoln, guest speaker of Phi Alpha society;

Colonel E. D. Baker, introduced Lincoln at the nominating convention;

E. A. Tanner, clergyman and educator, President of Illinois College;

Thomas C. Macmillan, Editor, Legislator and Moderator of the National Council of Congregational Churches of America;

Edmund J. James, Historian and President of Northwestern University and the University of Illinois;

Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy;

George D. Prentice;

Brigadier General E. B. Hamilton;

William Herndon, law partner and biographer of Abraham Lincoln;

Robert W. Patterson, first President of Lake Forest College;

Lyman Lacy - for twenty-four years Judge of Morgan County Circuit Court and the Appellate Court;

Hon. William Brown, General Solicitor of the Chicago and Alton Railroad;

E.B. Clapp, Professor of Greek, University of California

J.B. Turner, father of the Land Grant College;

John E. Bradley, Educator and Administrator;

Cyrus Epler, Judge of the Circuit Court of Morgan County for twenty-four years;

Brigadier General John Cook;

Carl E. Black

Jacksonville Illinois

(Approved)

Walter E. Lundeen